

Laetare, Refreshment, Mothering Sunday

You may well already know that, as well as being known as *Mothering Sunday*, today is also known as *Refreshment Sunday*, *Laetare Sunday* and the *Fourth Sunday in Lent*. Each of these names brings with it its own history, as well as an array of traditions and observances and what you call it kind of depends on where you wish to put your focus!

Mothering Sunday finds something of its origins as far back as the Middle Ages. The traditional Epistle (the Reading from the New Testament part of the Bible) for the day was taken from Galatians, *But Jerusalem which is above, is free, which is the mother of us all* and is believed to have referred to the Church as the *Jerusalem which is above*. People would visit their Mother Church (where they were, perhaps, baptised) – or Diocesan Church/Cathedral on the day – a tradition which then went on to extend out to children in Service visiting their mother on this Sunday. Tradition has it that, as they went, people and children would pick flowers along the way to decorate the church and/or to give to their mother – thus the practice of giving flowers to women in church was born. At St Mary's we give flowers to everyone though as we recognise that we all have a part to play in being 'mother' to each other – showing love, care, compassion.

The word **Laetare** is the Latin for 'rejoice' and the traditional Introit (the words spoken or sung at the very beginning of a Service) for this day would have begun, *Rejoice Jerusalem!* The call to the City of Jerusalem to rejoice – rejoice at her King (Jesus) coming, foreshadows the triumphant entry Jesus was to make to the city on the back of a donkey. We remember this entry on Palm Sunday which is just a two weeks away now. Jesus was hailed as King on Palm Sunday – and then mocked as King of the Jews on Good Friday, and yet the city is to rejoice – and we too are called to rejoice as Jesus was, is and always shall be King for all.

With regard to this being **Refreshment Sunday** – this too is an old tradition which allowed the strict Lenten Observances which people were following to be laid aside for this one day. The vestments in church would have been pink, as opposed the Lenten array of purple, and the sense of being able to look ahead to the glories of Easter would have been in the air. We don't wear pink at St Mary's, Rickmansworth but the theme of refreshment is one that is at the forefront of our thinking as we continue to provide clean water through the charity WaterAid. You can find out more about this on our church website.

This year's Mothering, Laetare and Refreshment Sunday may well feel more akin to being simply the **Fourth Sunday of Lent** as we are, in many senses, entering into a desert time.

The requirement for *social distancing* means that many will be forced to be on their own, in their own homes. Either through working at home, living alone and being unable to go out, becoming unwell and having to self-isolate, we are entering a time which will be like the time Jesus spent in the desert – away from the crowds, away from company, wholly reliant on the presence and companionship of his loving parent, God. I often say to children that one of the reasons Jesus went into the desert was to spend more time with God, in preparation for the time ahead when life would become very busy with healing, teaching and encouraging the people of God.

This current situation will feel rather like entering the desert for so many and, if it doesn't now, it may well do in a few weeks or months. Rather like the way in which people of old looked for springs in the desert, we need to find springs in the desert for ourselves and for others. We need to find ways in which we, like Jesus, can walk more closely with God. We need to find ways to rejoice – in all that God has given and that Jesus has done for us. Some possibilities...

Mothering Sunday: Who could you phone or write to today to say thank you for the care, compassion and love they have shown you through life. If the person you most think of as loving parent is no longer alive, light a candle for them and say thank you.

Laetare Sunday: Take a (large?!) piece of paper and, as the day goes through, write things for which/in which you rejoice: family, friends, music, birds singing, clouds in the sky, daffodils in the garden... You could even paint, or sing, or dance your rejoicing. Feel free to email or WhatsApp me your results so I can share in your rejoicing with you!

Refreshment Sunday: Social distancing does not prohibit walking and exercising outside so, if you can, simply go outside, walk and drink in the beauty. If you can't get out and about, sit beside an open window and listen to the sounds, and notice what is going on outside. Throughout Lent, we have been thinking of the gift of creation and the responsibility we share in caring for it. As you turn on the tap to fill a glass with water or the kettle, as you wash your hands or put on the washing machine, give thanks for the gift of free-flowing water, and pray for all those for whom medical-cleanliness is essential right now as we seek to stem the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

The Fourth Sunday of Lent: As we enter a time of social distancing and self-isolation that mimics Our Lord entering the desert, let us commit ourselves more earnestly to prayer – to spending time with God. This may be to intercede for others and for the current situation. Spending time with God can also be to give thanks for God's presence through life, to praise God for the marvellous gift of creation, to confess those things for which we need to ask forgiveness, to simply say, *Be with me, Lord, I'm afraid*. On the website you can download a booklet I have created called *Seven whole days* with a short passage of Scripture an image and a prayer for each day of the week.

We are, like Jesus in the desert, in uncharted territory – but none of us is alone. We have God as loving parent, Jesus as brother and friend, the Holy Spirit as companion and guide. We have friends in Christ at St Mary's. Let us reach out to one another – be as mother to one another – to offer love, compassion and care. (Whilst keeping an appropriate social distance, of course!)

Amen.